

The Builder.

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SATURDAY, JULY 10, 1847.



E have an especial interest in the character, conduct, and reputation of builders. The designation *Builder*, which we bear, includes, rightly thought upon, a large portion of society. Every arranger, inventor, artist, poet, is a *builder*: some build up fine thoughts, others fine fortunes or a noble reputation; and to all these, in their turn, our publication appeals. The term is, indeed, wide spreading; applying, not to speak irreverently, even to the Creator, who is himself called the *Great Builder*.

When we said at the commencement, however, that we had an interest in the character and reputation of builders, we meant builders, specially so called,—the constructors of our houses, churches, bridges, and palaces; an important and numerous body of men, in whose support, advancement, or defence, collectively, we are always ready to exert ourselves, whatever remarks we may feel it necessary to make on isolated occurrences or individual members of the body.

A monthly periodical, of high standing, has recently admitted into its pages some very vulgar abuse of the class in question,—abuse founded on ignorance and smartened up with malignity. The writer politely says:—

"There is nothing drier and more unprofitable under the sun, nothing more nearly approaching to a state of addle, than a builder's brains. Your regular builders (and, indeed, not a few of your architects) are the sorriest animals twaddling about on two legs; mere vivified bags of saw-dust, or lumps of lath and plaster, galvanised for a while, and forming themselves into strange, uncouth, unreasonable shapes. A mere 'builder' has not two ideas in his head; he has only one; he can draw only one 'specification,' as he calls it, under different forms; he can make only one plan; he has one set of cornices always in his eye; one peculiar style of panel; one special cut of a chimney. You may trace him all through a town, or across a county, if his fame extends so far; a dull repetition of the same motion characterises all his works. He served his apprenticeship to old Plumline, in Brick-lane; got up the *Carpenter's Trade-Memorial* by heart; had a little smattering of drawing from Daub the palotier, and then set up in business for himself."

He here confounds architects and builders; but he afterwards treats the former to a special dose; slogging out, it is true, one of a class, and not, as in the case of the builders, abusing the whole body without exception:—

"As for Triangle, the architect who built the grand town-hall here, the other day, in the newest style of Egyptian architecture, and copied two mummies for door-posts, and who is now putting up the pretty little Gothic church for the Diocesan Church-and-Chapel-Building and Pew-Extension Society, with an east window from York, and a spire from Salisbury, and a west front from Lincoln—why, he is the veriest atack of a designer that ever applied a T-square to a stretching-board. He has studied Wilkins's 'Vitruvius,' it is true, and he has looked all through 'Hunt's Tudor Architecture,' but his imagination is as poor as when he began them; he has never in his life seen one of the good buildings he is pirating from, barring St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey; he knows nothing finer than Regent-street and Pall-mall, and yet he pretends to be a modern Palladio. It will not do, all this sham and parade of knowledge; we

want a new generation, both of architects and builders, before we shall see any thing good arising in the way of houses—not as this new progeny is not likely to spring up within a few days, nor even years, we may as well buckle to the task of criticism at once, and find out faults, which we shall leave others to mend."

The writer then proceeds to make out his case against the poor architects and builders, by pointing out these faults, the majority of which, as he admits in his progress, are the faults of employers, and of employers alone. Does the builder of a country squire's mansion (to such he is referring) recommend thin walls instead of thick; a cheap, small, trumpery structure, rather than a sound, well-finished, costly residence? A reply to the question must be unnecessary. Such a house as the writer recommends, the employer remarks, "is horribly expensive." Why, a house built after this fashion would cost three times the amount of any one now erected upon the usual specifications! and our critic replies, "Of course it would. Materials and labour are out to be had gratuitously; but then, if the house costs three times as much, it will be worth three times more than what it would otherwise fetch, and it will last more than three times as long." No doubt of it, we echo. But how does this prove our "regular builders are the sorriest animals twaddling about on two legs; mere vivified bags of saw-dust, or lumps of lath and plaster, galvanised for a while?" How does it shew that there is "nothing drier or more unprofitable under the sun, nothing more nearly approaching to a state of addle, than a builder's brains?"

We have not quoted this foolish tirade because we thought it needed contradiction, but simply as affording us an opportunity to assert what we honestly believe to be true, namely, that our builders, as a body, are an intelligent, shrewd, and able set of men, capable of carrying out in a perfect manner works of any magnitude. We are not speaking now merely of the Cubitts, Peto, Grissell, Baker, Piper, Jackson, Kelk, Hayward, or a score other men, who stand at the head of the list, but of the body generally; and we are quite satisfied by long experience, that what we say is correct. The enormous extent to which our engineering works have been carried, the millions spent in the construction of railways, bridges, stations, &c., have, further, led men of education and capital into practical operations, who before confined themselves to devising and superintending. The builders of to-day are a very different set of men from the builders of thirty years ago. There are amongst them many sharp, and even scamping practitioners, but few whose brains are in "a state of addle," or who can be justly considered as "vivified bags of saw-dust," or "galvanised lumps of lath and plaster."

The want of skill amongst certain classes of our operatives, the badness of much of our construction, and the causes which have led to these deficiencies, are different matters requiring separate consideration. It is our aim by spreading abroad knowledge, to lessen these evils; and if we may venture to believe statements often made to us, considerable success is attending the effort. We see the course plainly before us, and have no fear for the future.

Amongst other points to be urged is, the maintenance of a proper feeling between masters and their operatives; and under this head we are led to give here the substance of the memorial, addressed by the carpenters and joiners to their masters (to which we alluded

last week), because of its good tone and propriety of diction:—

"We have long witnessed, and been participants in, numerous evils, arising from the very limited time and unseasonable hour that is left to us to expend our weekly earnings, for the benefit of ourselves and those dependent upon us for subsistence and support. These evils with their inevitable consequences, physical, mental, and moral, we deeply deplore and seek to remedy; and earnestly hope to meet with like sympathy from you.

We therefore have been induced to solicit you to grant us the privilege (without diminution in our wages), of leaving our work at four o'clock* on Saturdays, which will reduce our hours of labour to 54½ per week.

In making this request, we would direct your attention to the fact, that this privilege has already been granted by employers to various parts of the country, and also to several trades in the metropolis, and has been found to operate most beneficially both to employers and employed; and it is our earnest conviction that all measures which manifest a regard for the well being of the workmen, tend also to the interest of the employer.

We also venture to hope that this mode of making known our wishes may meet with your cordial approval, as tending to conciliate and unite our interests, and that in future all differences between employers and employed may be settled in an amicable manner, without resorting to such injurious measures as strikes.

The trade in general, take this opportunity to express their gratitude to those employers who do not detain their workmen in waiting for their earnings, beyond the hour of leaving work, and earnestly impress upon all others to follow such admirable examples, feeling certain that they will be fully repaid in the increased satisfaction and good feeling of their workmen.

In conclusion, we now leave this memorial in your hands, trusting that it will meet with your favourable consideration and early attention, and that you will reciprocate the friendly spirit in which it has been presented.

We support the request, and are satisfied that the masters will lose nothing by granting it.

In connection with the welfare of the operatives, we would draw attention to "The Builders' Benevolent Institution," founded for the purpose of affording relief to persons connected with the building trades, and which seems well entitled to the support of all who have men working under them."

A SPHERICAL CHURCH.

Those who recollect how much Mr. Gervase's design for the Nelson monument was criticised, would be ill-prepared for another project, lately published. This is no less than a design for a church in the form of a globe, supported by kneeling figures. The model of this "religious monument in a sphere" is prefaced by some observations, perhaps intended as a preparation for the system, against the shock which the sudden administering of so huge a pill would otherwise occasion. They partake much of the character of those with which what we should call an enormous box, is ushered in every where. When we find an argument commenced with "it is an undoubted fact," we do the reverse of what is intended, and examine. The result generally shews a positive untruth. We do not say quite so much of the observations alluded to, although they are not conceived independently, and with a clear view of the circumstances, but are influenced by the disposition mentioned. They are indeed, in a great measure, founded in fact. "Never," says the writer, "had any century a more marked tendency than ours to emancipate itself from opinions and rules transmitted by the past. Philosophy, politics, science, industry, literature, have manifested to a great extent this need of independence. The fine arts themselves are directed into new

* Not shown, as stated last week.

† An advertisement of the first number, bearing date 1. July 1847, is omitted.